

# UNCELEBRATED VENICE

*Venezia Minore* by Egle Renata Trincanato  
A New Critical Edition

edited by Angelo Maggi





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**Uncelebrated Venice**  
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Angelo Maggi  
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The heirs of Egle Renata Trincanato – Corrado Trincanato Balistreri e Emiliano Balistreri – have allowed the translation and the publication of this volume.

Editor's note: In the text, the abbreviation "n.a." refers to the "Numero Anagrafico", an Italian numbering system that corresponds to the civic or street number of a building. Please note that Venice follows a unique system of numbering its buildings. In this edition of the book, we have also updated the house numbering to assist readers in more easily identifying the buildings referenced by Trincanato.

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Andrea Iorio

## Inside *Venezia Minore*

I would also like to thank all those Venetians who have welcomed me into their homes, thereby allowing me to carry out my many investigations and direct observations<sup>1</sup>.

In the acknowledgements at the beginning of her volume, Egle Renata Trincanato explicitly reveals one crucial aspect in her study into “Uncelebrated Venice”: her personal, extensive, and intrinsic knowledge of the city’s physical form. As an essential operational prerequisite, such knowledge was fundamental to understanding the intimate coherence and extraordinary resilience of a city that, despite inevitable layers of change over time, has maintained what we might describe as its urban identity – a complex system of internal reasoning and open relationships, which are always diverse yet persistent in the multifaceted variety of its parts.

Through these acknowledgements, moreover, Trincanato recognises her debt to several scholars and experts of Venice with whom she exchanged knowledge. The first is Giulio Lorenzetti, who penned the extensive guide *Venezia e il suo estuario* (*Venice and its Estuary*) in 1926. So rich is this text in notes on the monuments and lesser-known sites throughout the lagoon that it long remained a fundamental reference point not only for casual travellers but also for scholars. Lorenzetti, who taught art history at Luav, likely inspired the research in the mid-1930s which would culminate in the volume of *Venezia Minore* (*Uncelebrated Venice*) in 1948. Then, there is Rodolfo Gallo, a deep connoisseur of Venetian bibliographic and archival resources, and finally, her colleague Angelo Scattolin, another architect and professor at

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1 In Italian: “Ringrazio anche tutti quei veneziani che, permettendomi di entrare nelle loro case, mi facilitarono tante indagini e osservazioni dirette”.

Iuav. Trincanato would later collaborate with Scattolin on several projects, including conservation interventions at the Villaggio San Marco, where the reinterpretation of Venice's urban space would form a central theme. However, Trincanato's thanks to these scholars are distinctly professional, even somewhat detached, referring to "some artistic, historical and technical insights" that they so kindly provided. The same applies to the Sovrintendenza (Heritage Authority), whom she thanks for the provision of "some surveys and photographs".

Her third acknowledgement, by contrast, is decidedly more distinctive. While it may seem generic at first, it instead reveals itself to be heartfelt<sup>2</sup> and significant, indicating how much the essence and originality of her work derives from the "many investigations and direct observations" the author carried out herself in an almost door-to-door field study. "Insights", "surveys and photographs", and "investigations and direct observations": the tools typically deployed in this kind of research are herein arranged in ascending order, emphasised by the contrast between the first two indefinite adjectives – "some" – and the subsequent "many."

In one sense, the object of the research itself demanded such an approach. The less "celebrated" part of the city, the so-called *minore* (vernacular), had largely remained on the margins of hitherto conducted urban studies and lacked a systematic survey. The task undertaken by Trincanato could only be based on a renewed relationship with Venice's urban fabric, which Trincanato accomplishes by literally entering inside and exploring from within. Through this method, she accumulates a body of references – in which direct experience becomes an indispensable complement to historical and archival research – which serve as the foundations for a deeper understanding of the city.

In terms of its narrative structure, *Venezia Minore* does not follow a progressive, chronological, or hierarchical thread. Rather, the impression is one of continually jumping from the general concept to the very guts of the city, in line with a principle stated in the first two lines: "No city compares to Venice for the influence its unique urban topography has exerted over the intimate characteristics of its [vernacular] architecture" (p. 41). The city's overall layout, with its inherent constraints, and its specific places, with their unique solutions, cannot be examined in isolation when reinterpreting the "features" of Venetian architecture.

And so, after a brief initial overview of Venice's network as a system of progressively connected insular settlements – not coincidentally the only pages where illustrations of the city appear as a whole, though viewed from afar – we quickly begin our "descent" into the city's urban spaces, as if to observe them in person. This begins a lengthy exploration of the multiple interconnected systems that innervate the city. The infrastructural interlacing of rii (canals), bridges, fondamenta (embankments), calli (alleyways), campi (squares) and campielli (small squares). Then there are the buildings – seldom individual, more often constructional complexes – with their various layouts, sculpted by the volumetric masses of porteghi (porticoes) or barbacani (barbicans).

Finally, we step inside the palazzi (palaces), palazzetti (smaller palaces), and humble case (houses), where we bear witness to the innumerable figurative and, above all, combinatorial variations of the recurring elements from which they are formed. Trincanato's account never reduces itself to a catalogue, however. Her focus remains

2 Such sentiment is comparable only to the "heartfelt gratitude" Trincanato addresses to Professor Giuseppe Samonà in the last paragraph of the acknowledgements.

fixed on the systems of inter-relationships: between the elements; between the structural layouts and the life that plays out within them; and between the needs, outcomes, and possible limitations of these assemblages and modifications, with a particular interest in clarifying the techniques of their designs.

Both the text and illustrations conjure up a whirlwind of images in pursuit of this, enveloping the reader in Venice's rich and labyrinthine fabric. Using what we might describe as a "tableaux" narrative, reinforced by the deliberate use of illustrations, the discussion flows like a wayward excursion off the beaten path, punctuated by impromptu revelations that extract underlying principles from the richness we experience while always bringing the reader back to the overall vision, which the author maintains throughout at the forefront of her mind.

Unlike with cities on the mainland, the inability to define a predetermined structure (especially of the road system) in Venice favoured an extraordinary proliferation of "urban planning solutions," which "showcase the skill and ingenuity with which architects adapted the city's complicated lagoon topography to the complex needs of their evolving civilisation" (p. 47). This richness is linked to another defining characteristic of the city's architecture: the inextricable and widespread intertwining of grand buildings and vernacular constructions, capable of producing fascinating "sculpturesque effects" and "sudden changes it brings to the spatial expression of Venice's topography" (p. 46). The articulation of continuity and systematic variations, in a "unique arrangement of masses, orchestrated according to a flexible vision of spaces" (p. 47) could only ever be perceived through those "many investigations and direct observations" that Trincanato acknowledged at the beginning. At the same time, they testify that the object of study is ultimately much more Venice in its complex entirety than any single part of the lagoon-locked city, at least insofar as that, for Trincanato, Venice's vernacular architecture demonstrates "a lively engagement with overall harmony" (p. 51).

Even in the two subsequent lengthy sections, dedicated to the sestieri of Castello and Dorsoduro<sup>3</sup>, Trincanato's choice to shape her narrative chronologically has nothing to do with any interest in dating. Instead, it serves to retrace, time and again – as though it were a single design process spanning centuries – the transformations that have affected the various complexes under consideration, equilibrating the emergence of new needs with the permanence of deep-rooted characteristics. In this way does Trincanato retrace, deconstruct, and reassemble the techniques of Venetian architectural and urban composition. It is easy to imagine that Trincanato's ultimate goal (which was hardly "minor" at all) was to understand the functioning and construction of this historic city, with one eye on its reinterpretation amidst urban design activities. Such as, in part, would indeed come to pass.

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3 In the text, the author promises to follow up this volume with similar treatises on the other sestieri (p. 116).



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## Venezia Minore by Egle Renata Trincanato A New Critical Edition

First published in 1948, *Venezia Minore* – or *Uncelebrated Venice* – is Egle Renata Trincanato's landmark study of Venice's urban fabric from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. A pioneering architect and scholar, Trincanato was the first woman to graduate in Architecture from the Regio Istituto Superiore di Venezia in 1938. Her meticulous research laid the foundation for later morphological studies, shaping the way we understand the city's lesser-known architectural heritage.

Now, on the 77<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its original publication, this new English critical edition brings Trincanato's insights to an international audience. Rich with her original drawings and archival materials preserved in the Università Iuav di Venezia's Archivio Progetti, this edition also reproduces her rare layout mockup – annotated by hand and carefully composed. More than a book, *Uncelebrated Venice* stands as a testament to Trincanato's vision of the printed page as both an intellectual and artistic creation.

A must-read for scholars, students, architects, and lovers of Venice alike, this volume invites readers to rediscover the city's hidden architectural treasures through the eyes of one of its most influential thinkers.

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